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FM AMEMBASSY PARIS

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AMCONSUL STRASBOURG

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 3 PARIS 0936

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PGOV,N PFOR, FR, PINT

SUBJECT: FRENCH INTERNAL POLITICAL SCENE -- DECEMBER
1975

SUMMARY. DECEMBER WAS AN UNSETTLED MONTH ON THE
INTERNAL POLITICAL SCENE. PROBLEMS WITH BUSINESS
INTERESTS, THE ARMY AND WHITE COLLAR WORKERS, THE REVE-
LATION OF A HUGE SOCIAL SECURITY DEFICIT, INTRAPARTY
FIGHTING ON EVERY FRONT, THE QUESTIONABLE FUTURE FOR
PROPOSED BUSINESS AND CAPITAL GAINS TAX REFORMS, AND THE
UNSPECTACULAR END OF THE FALL PARLIAMENTARY SESSION, ALL
COMBINED TO MODERATE THE CHRISTMAS CHEER OF MANY A
FRENCH POLITICIAN. PERHAPS THE BEST THING THAT COULD
HAPPEN TO GISCARD AT THIS POINT WOULD BE AN ECONOMIC
UPSWING NOTICEABLE ENOUGH TO AFFECT VGE'S PRECARIOUS
POPULARITY POLLS, THOUGH THIS IS UNLIKELY IN THE COMING
MONTHS. VAGUE RUMORS OF LEGISLATIVE ELECTIONS TO BE
CALLED THIS YEAR HAVE CIRCULATED. IF CONFIRMED, GISCARD
WILL HAVE TO CHOSE THE MOMENT CAREFULLY IF HE IS TO AVOID
THE POSSIBILITY OF HAVING A LEFT MAJORITY IN PARLIAMENT.
END SUMMARY.

1. DISSATISFACTION IN THE BUSINESS COMMUNITY: A
SERIES OF FATAL WORK ACCIDENTS LED CERTAIN MAGISTRATES,
CALLED "RED JUDGES" BY THE CONSERVATIVE PRESS, TO
IMPRISON FACTORY OWNERS FOR NEGLIGENCE. WHILE SENTENCES
WERE LIGHT AND MOST OWNERS WERE RELEASED ALMOST IMME-
DIATELY, THE ACTION BROUGHT SHARP RETALIATION FROM LEON
GINGEMBRE, HEAD OF PME, AN ORGANIZATION GROUPING SMALL
AND MIDDLE-SIZED BUSINESSES. HE FOUNDED UNICER (UNION
OF BUSINESS HEADS AND DIRECTORS) AS AN ANSWER TO WHAT
HE AND THE (ALREADY) 25,000 ADHERENTS OF THE UNICER,
FOR THE MOST PART ALREADY MEMBERS OF PME, FEEL TO BE
DANGEROUS GOF ECONOMIC POLICIES, INCLUDING DELAY IN
RECOVERY AND PLANNED ENFORCEMENT OF TAX COLLECTION WHEN
PRESSURE ON CORPORATE FINANCES ARE ALREADY VERY HEAVY.
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IN ADDITION, THEY RESENT THE FACT THAT, IN A TIME OF
RECESSION, THEY HAVE BEEN OBLIGED TO KEEP ON DISPROPOR-
TIONATELY HIGH STAFFS, RESULTING IN A PRODUCTIVITY DROP
OF UP TO 15 PERCENT. THEY CONSIDER THEMSELVES THE
SCAPEGOATS OF GOF MISHANDLING OF THE FRENCH ECONOMY.
THERE IS NO DOUBT THAT GINGEMBRE REPRESENTS A POTENT
FORCE WITH WHOM GISCARD MUST DEAL, BUT ANY OVERT GESTURE
TO PLACATE UNICER WOULD LAMOST CERTAINLY RESULT IN UNION

RETALIATION OR DO VIOLENCE TO GOVERNMENT ECONOMIC POLICY.

2. THE MAJORITY: TWO EVENTS MARKED UDR ACTIVITIES IN DECEMBER; THE YOUTH CONGRESS AND THE BRIVE AFFAIR. AT THE FORMER, CHIRAC CAME OFF AS A CRACKERJACK, WHILE VGE'S NAME WAS ACTUALLY BOOED (WHICH REVEALS THE GROWING DISSENSION IN THE MAJORITY). THE BRIVE AFFAIR CONCERNS UDR MAYOR JEAN CHARBONNEL AND HIS ACCUSATION THAT THE UDR IS BEING "GISCARDIZED." FOR HIS PAINS HE SAW, ON THE 18TH, THE OFFICIAL DISSOLUTION OF THE UDR CIRCUMSCRIPTION OF BRIVE BY THE UDR NATIONAL COMMITTEE WHICH, IN THE FACE OF GROWING INDEPENDENT REPUBLICAN ACTIVISM, CAN LITTLE AFFORD THIS KIND OF FRATRICIDE. THE IR, ON THE OTHER HAND, IS MOVING ALONG WITH THE KIND OF EASY ASSURANCE THE GAULLISTS MUST ENVY. AS EXPECTED, MINISTER OF THE INTERIOR PONIATOWSKI STEPPED DOWN FROM THE PRESIDENCY OF THE PARTY (PARIS 33084) AND WILL NOT BE REPLACED, SECRETARY-GENERAL JACQUES DOMINATI ASSUMING OSTENSIBLE DIRECTION. IN ADDITION, PONIATOWSKI'S SON-IN-LAW, BERTRAND DE MAIGRET, HAS BEEN NAMED HEAD OF THE NEW IR NATIONAL COMMITTEE FOR THE SUPPORT OF THE PRESIDENT OF THE REPUBLIC, WHOSE PURPOSE IS TO GATHER SUPPORT FOR VGE FROM ALL POLITICAL PARTIES, BUT PARTICULARLY THE LEFT. THIS ENDEAVOR STANDS A MODERATE CHANCE OF SUCCESS IF THE ECONOMIC SITUATION DOES NOT WORSEN.

3. THE LEFT: DECEMBER'S MAJOR DEVELOPMENT ON THE LEFT WAS A CAREFULLY-ORCHESTRATED COMMUNIST (PCF) ATTEMPT TO PORTRAY THE PARTY AS NOW FREE OF SOVIET DOMINATION. BEGINNING WITH THE HUMANITE/PRAVDA QUARREL OVER THE EXISTENCE OF THE GOULAG (PARIS 33575) AND CONTINUING THROUGH PCF EXPRESSIONS OF SELF-CONGRATULATION OVER THE ANTICIPATED FREEING OF SOVIET PHYSICIST LEONID PLOUTCH, CONFIDENTIAL

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THE PCF HAS MOVED TO A POSITION WHICH IT DESCRIBES AS "SOLIDARITY AND VIGILANCE" WITH RESPECT TO THE SOVIETS. THE PCF'S ACTIONS HAVE NOT BEEN CONFINED TO THE POLITICAL ARENA -- PCF IDEOLOGUES ARE SLOWLY, CAREFULLY, TAKING A PUBLIC LOOK AT THE SACRED COW OF COMMUNIST IDEOLOGY, SEEKING TO REDEFINE THE IDEA OF THE DICTATORSHIP OF THE PROLETARIAT. THE IMPLICATION SEEMS OBVIOUS:

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P R 121900Z JAN 76

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THE PCF IS TRYING TO SEND A MESSAGE TO FRENCH VOTERS THAT IT NOW WISHES TO BECOME A CONSTITUTIONAL FRENCH PARTY WHOSE GOALS ARE TRULY PART OF A PROCESS OF DEMOCRATIC CHANGE IN FRANCE. IT IS STILL TOO EARLY TO TELL IF THE PROCESS WILL WORK, OR IF THE DISCUSSION WILL DIE DOWN ONCE THE FEBRUARY PCF CONGRESS AND THE CONFERENCE OF EUROPEAN COMMUNIST PARTIES HAVE TAKEN PLACE. WHAT IS ALREADY EVIDENT, HOWEVER, IS THAT PCF/SOCIALIST RELATIONS HAVE MOVED AWAY FROM THE BITTER QUARREL OF THE LAST 14 MONTHS INTO A NEW, CALMER STAGE IN WHICH HARD STRATEGIC DECISIONS OVER ELECTIONS, PROGRAMS AND LOCAL ACTION ARE BEING DISCUSSED.

4. CENTER: THE RADICAL SOCIALISTS INSTALLED A NEW POLITICAL DIRECTORSHIP. PRESAGED BY THE NOVEMBER REELECTION OF STATE SECRETARY FOR CIVIL SERVICE GABRIEL PERONNET TO PARTY PRESIDENCY (PARIS 31296), IT COULD BE READ AS A SETBACK FOR FORMER PARTY PRESIDENT JEAN-JACQUES SERVAN-SCHREIBER. JJSS SUPPORTERS, MOST NOTABLY FORMER SECRETARY GENERAL BRIGITTE GROS, WERE REMOVED FROM POSITIONS OF INFLUENCE AND REPLACED BY A FULL PERONNET TEAM. IT IS UNCLEAR FOR THE MOMENT WHAT JJSS' NEXT MOVE WILL BE (BOLTING THE PARTY IS ONE RUMOR) BUT IN ANY EVENT PERONNET HAS CLEARLY TAKEN CONTROL, THUS MAKING THE RADICAL SOCIALISTS AT LEAST marginally MORE ATTRACTIVE TO FORMER ADHERENTS WHO LEFT THE PARTY OVER DIFFERENCES WITH JJSS. ELSEWHERE, ANOTHER CENTRIST FORMATION, THE CENTER REPUBLICAN PARTY, IS REPORTEDLY ENGAGED IN NEGOTIATIONS WITH RADICAL SOCIALISTS AIMED AT AN EVENTUAL UNIFICATION OF THE TWO GROUPINGS. THOSE TWO DEVELOPMENTS NOTWITHSTANDING, IT APPEARS THAT WHATEVER HOPES WHICH GISCARD HOLDS FOR EMPLOYING THE RADICAL SOCIALISTS AS A POLE OF ATTRACTION FOR MORE MODERATE LEFTISTS ARE STYMIED, FOR THE MOMENT AT LEAST, AS A RESULT OF GOVERNMENT ATTACKS ON THE LEFT OVER "DEMORALI-

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ZATION" IN THE ARMED FORCES.

5. REFORMS: THERE WAS A SPATE OF REFORMS SUGGESTED OR LEGISLATIVELY PROPOSED DURING DECEMBER, WHICH WILL COMMAND MUCH ATTENTION IN COMING MONTHS. THERE ARE EITHER COMMITTEES OR PORPOSED LEGISLATION ON HOUSING, MANUAL LABOR, CAPITAL GAINS TAXES, CORPORATE REFORM, THE FAMILY, AND LOCAL COMMUNITIES TO NAME THE MAJOR

ISSUES. GISCARD WILL HAVE TROUBLE, HOWEVER, GETTING HIS REFORMS PASSED, SINCE THE LEFT, WHOSE SUPPORT HE MAY NEED, EVEN THOUGH IN FAVOR OF MOST OF THE REFORMS, CANNOT SUPPORT THE LEGISLATION AS IS WITHOUT HAVING ITS THUNDER STOLEN. IN ADDITION, TWO OF THE MAJOR REFORMS -- CAPITAL GAINS AND CORPORATE REFORM -- WILL UNDOUBTEDLY MEET STRONG OPPOSITION FROM GISCARD'S OWN CAMP. THUS THE PRESIDENT CAN EXPECT TO SEE AT LEAST THESE TWO REFORMS WATERED DOWN, MUCH LIKE THE 1975 EDUCATION REFORM (HABY) BILL. SIGNIFICANTLY, THE PRESIDENT GETS CREDIT FOR REFORMS, BUT REALLY DOESN'T PUSH THE EXPENSIVE ONES.

6. THE ARMY: THE ISSUE OF THE MONTH WAS UNDOUBTEDLY THE ARMY (PARIS 32233) AND THE ARREST OF 47 SOLDIERS AND CIVILIANS ACCUSED OF "DEMORALIZATION OF THE ARMY" FOR THE DISTRIBUTION OF TRACTS AND UNIONIZING ACTIVITIES IN THE RANKS. RATHER THAN SHEDDING LIGHT ON THE REAL ISSUES (WHETHER THE ACCUSED REALLY DID ACT ILLEGALLY, WHAT ARE THE CIVIL RIGHTS OF SOLDIERS, HOW THE MILITARY SHOULD BE ORGANIZED IN THE FUTURE), THE DEBATE QUICKLY BECAME POLITICAL AND POSITIONS OF THE MAIN ACTORS (MAJORITY, OPPOSITION, AND LABOR UNIONS) HARDENED ALONG ESTABLISHED LINES.

7. IN THE PROCESS, THE IMAGE OF ALL PARTICIPANTS WAS TARNISHED, GOF FOR HAVING EXAGGERATED AN OTHERWISE ROUTINE MATTER, AND BOTH OPPOSITION PARTIES AND UNIONS (ESPECIALLY THE CFDT) FOR SHOWING SEVERE STRAINS AND TENSIONS BEFORE FINALLY AGREEING ON A COMMON POSITION (WITH THE EXCEPTION OF THE PSU). THE OPPOSITION CAME OUT SQUARELY AGAINST UNIONS IN THE ARMY AND THEN WISELY WIDENED THE DEBATE TO GROUND OF ITS OWN CHOOSING OF LIBERTIES IN GENERAL AND THE ABSENCE OF CONFIDENTIAL

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ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL REFORMS BY THE GOF. THIS TACTIC HAS FORMED AN ECHO IN THE PRESS AND THE PUBLIC, WHICH FIND IT INCREASINGLY DIFFICULT TO UNDERSTAND WHY THE GOF REFUSES TO COME FORWARD WITH ENOUGH EVIDENCE TO MAKE OUT A CASE AGAINST THE 47 AND, EVEN MORE, WHY IT CONTINUES TO INCARCERATE 12 OF THEM. IF ANYTHING SALUTARY CAN BE SAID TO HAVE COME OUT OF THE AFFAIR, IT IS POSSIBLE THAT THE PUBLIC HAS BEEN SENSITIZED TO THE FACT THAT A THOROUGH MILITARY DEBATE IS LONG OVERDUE AND THAT FOR ALL THE GOVERNMENT TALKS ABOUT REFORM, THIS AREA CANNOT SAFELY BE IGNORED FOR LONG.

8. SOCIAL SECURITY: ANOTHER GROWING CONCERN IS THE ENORMOUS (TWO BILLION DOLLAR) SOCIAL SECURITY DEFICIT. GOF DECIDED IN DECEMBER TO MAKE UP A LARGE PART OF THIS

DEFICIT BY INCREASING THE SS CONTRIBUTIONS AND RAISING
CEILING ON WHICH CONTRIBUTIONS ARE MADE BY EMPLOYERS
AND EMPLOYEES. MAINLY AS A RESULT OF THIS DECISION
YVON CHARPENTIER, PRESIDENT OF THE CGC (CADRES), CALLED
A NATIONAL STRIKE OF SUPERVISORY AND TECHNICAL PERSON-
NEL ON DECEMBER 18, THE FOURTH OF ITS KIND SINCE WORLD
WAR TWO. ITS SUPPORT, HOWEVER, WAS LIMITED TO PARIS,
AND EVEN THERE NO MORE THAN 3,000 CADRES SHOWED UP AT
THE MEETING PLACE IN FRONT OF THE INVALIDES. THIS
RECONFIRMS THE VIEW THAT THE STRIKE IS NOT AS MUCH OF A
WEAPON FOR THE CADRES AS IT IS FOR THE RANK AND FILE.
ON DECEMBER 18, HOWEVER, CGT AND CFTD CALLED ALSO FOR A
NATIONAL DAY OF ACTION ON STANDARD JOB SECURITY AND
INFLATION ISSUES, WHICH IN RETROSPECT IS AS DEAD A
POLITICAL GESTURE AS YESTERDAY'S HEADLINES.

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9. LIBERTIES: THE SUBJECT OF LIBERTIES IS ON EVERYONE'S LIPS, PERHAPS SPURRED BY THE DEBATE OVER UNIONS IN THE ARMY AND THE PCF'S NEW-FOUND "VIRTUE." CHIRAC DISCUSSED IT AT THE UDR YOUTH RALLY; AND SHORTLY THEREAFTER THE UDR LAUNCHED A CAMPAIGN OF "REFLECTION ON LIBERTY." IN THE CHAMBER OF DEPUTIES THE MAJORITY PROPOSED A LAW CONDEMNING EUTHANASIA AND INSTITUTING THE RIGHT OF RESPONSE ON TV AND RADIO. ASSEMBLY PRESIDENT EDGAR FAURE HAS BEEN NAMED PRESIDENT OF A SPECIAL COMMISSION TO STUDY VARIOUS PROPOSITIONS PERTAINING TO LIBERTY, AND ALREADY THE ISSUE HAS BECOME ONE MORE SOURCE OF COMPETITION BETWEEN THE MAJORITY AND THE LEFT, EACH OF WHOM HOLDS DIFFERENT IDEAS ON THE MEANING OF LIBERTY, AND BOTH BLAME THE FIFTH REPUBLIC CONSTITUTION, WHEN TREATING LIBERTIES, TO BE MORE THEORETICAL THAN REALISTIC. ASIDE FROM LIMITED, BASICALLY NON-POLITICAL ISSUES ON WHICH ALL CAN AGREE, LIKE EUTHANASIA, IT IS DIFFICULT TO IMAGINE THAT ANY SIGNIFICANTLY INNOVATIVE LEGISLATION WILL BE PROPOSED. THE UDR, HOWEVER, HAS SCORED A POINT OVER THE PCF BY CHALLENGING THE PCF ATTEMPT TO MONOPOLIZE THE ISSUE OF LIBERTY.

10. PARLIAMENT: ENDING ITS AUTUMN SESSION, PARLIAMENT CAN LOOK BACK TO ACCOMPLISHMENTS IN THE FIELDS OF REAL ESTATE, THE BUDGET, AND THE STATUTE OF PARIS. NEVERTHELESS, A GENERAL MALAISE SEEMED TO MARK THE BODY'S

CLOSING DAYS. RECORD ABSENTEEISM, POOR WORK CONDITIONS (MOST DEPUTIES HAVE NO PRIVATE SECRETARY, NO ASSISTANT, MINISCULE OFFICES) AND LOW GOF FUNDING HAVE ALL COMBINED TO PRODUCE A DEPRESSING EFFECT ON THE LEGISLATURE. CERTAIN MEASURES HAVE ALREADY BEEN TAKEN TO RECTIFY GLARING SHORTCOMINGS (GOF WILL FUND ONE ASSISTANT FOR EACH DEPUTY, FOR EXAMPLE), BUT OTHERS, SUCH AS A DEPUTY'S HAVING TO PAY LONG DISTANCE CALLS EVEN TO HIS OWN CONSTITUENCY, WILL UNDOUBTEDLY REMAIN FOR A LONG TIME

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TO COME. AND ALTHOUGH LEGISLATIVE ELECTIONS ARE STILL TECHNICALLY MORE THAN TWO YEARS AWAY, MANY DEPUTIES, BOTH MAJORITY AND LEFT, ARE ALREADY BEGINNING TO WORRY ABOUT THE SOLIDITY OF THEIR POSITIONS.

11. RUMORS AND SNIPPITS: POLLS ARE MIXED BUT ALL AGREE ON ONE POINT: THE MAJORITY CANNOT AFFORD TO SIT BACK AND RELAX FOR A SECOND. THE RUMORED CABINET CHANGE IS NOW EXPECTED TO TAKE PLACE MAINLY AT THE SECRETARY OF STATE LEVEL. THE QUESTION OF VOTE BY UNIVERSAL SUFFRAGE FOR THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT (PARIS 33586) IS STILL A BONE OF CONTENTION IN THE MAJORITY, BUT THERE IS LITTLE DOUBT THAT FRANCE WILL GO EVENTUALLY THE WAY OF MOST OF HER EEC PARTNERS. THE PROBLEM OF REGIONALISM REARED ITS VIOLENT HEAD IN CORSICA AND THE BASQUE AREAS, WHERE VIOLENT BOMBINGS TOOK PLACE AT VARIOUS TIMES DURING THE MONTH. PRIME MINISTER CHIRAC MADE A QUICK TRIP TO THE ANTILLES TO SHOW THE FLAG, BUT WOUND UP HIGHLIGHTING EXISTING PROBLEMS BETWEEN METROPOLITAN FRANCE AND HER DISTANT DEPARTMENTS AS MUCH AS SOOTHING THEM.

12. CONCLUSIONS: DECEMBER BROUGHT MOSTLY COAL TO THE CHRISTMAS STOCKINGS OF FRENCH POLITICANS. WITH ONE PROBLEM FOLLOWING ANOTHER, ESPECIALLY IN THE DOMAIN OF SOCIAL AFFAIRS, THE PHENOMENON OF A NATIONAL PREOCCUPATION WITH LIBERTIES BECOMES MORE EXPLANABLE. EVEN MORE TELLING, HOWEVER, IS THE REFINED TONE THAT CRITICISM OF THE PRESIDENT HAS TAKEN, AND THE INCREASINGLY NEAT DIVISION OF THIS COUNTRY INTO TWO DISTINCT POLITICAL CAMPS, THOSE FOR AND THOSE AGAINST THE PRESIDENT. THERE IS THE FEELING THAT, ALTHOUGH FRANCE APPEARS TO BE SLOWLY AND PRECARIOUSLY BEGINNING AN ECONOMIC RECOVERY, LITTLE ELSE IS GOING THE WAY IT SHOULD. FOR MANY GISCARD IS NOT BRINGING THE AUTHORITY TO RUNNING THE GOVERNMENT THAT HE SHOULD. OTHERS REITERATE THEIR ACCUSATIONS OF DILLETANTISM. THE MORE LIBERAL HIS POLICIES APPEAR, THE MORE HE SEEMS TO ALIENATE MAJORITY AND LEFT ALIKE. WITH THE POLLS TO REMIND HIM EACH MONTH HOW SLENDER HIS

MARGIN IS, IT WILL BE INTERESTING TO SEE WHAT CONCES-
SIONS HE MAKES TO GINGEMBRE AND OTHERS TO RETAIN HIS
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